

VZCZCXRO9847
RR RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHFN #0391/01 2750809
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 020809Z OCT 09
FM AMEMBASSY FREETOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2904
RUEHPNH/NVC PORTSMOUTH NH 0001
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 0526
RUEHFT/AMCONSUL FRANKFURT 1547
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 FREETOWN 000391

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR CA/FPP, CA/VO/KCC
ACCRA FOR DHS
FRANKFURT FOR RCO

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [CMGT](#) [CVIS](#) [CPAS](#) [ASEC](#) [KFRD](#) [SL](#)
SUBJECT: Fraud Summary - Freetown

Ref: 08 STATE 074840

Country Conditions

1. Freetown is a high fraud post. Despite much progress since the end of an 11-year civil war in 2001, Sierra Leone is ranked last on the UN Human Development Index. As such, socioeconomic conditions for many residents are poor and many people seek a better life elsewhere. There is a large diaspora of Sierra Leoneans throughout the world, especially in the U.S. and UK. Sierra Leoneans often expect, and receive, remittances from extended family members living in wealthier countries. Furthermore, many Sierra Leoneans will try to join their family members abroad, legally or illegally. Corruption is present at all levels of society, particularly in government. It is therefore easy to obtain authentic documents with false information, sometimes by bribing officials.

NIV Fraud

2. Most NIV fraud consists of false bank statements and invitation letters. This usually results in a 214(b) refusal rather than a formal investigation by the Fraud Prevention Unit (FPU). However, the FPU confirms that over half of NIV cases referred to it are fraudulent. B visas constitute eighty-four percent of all applications. Of the rest, only A, F, and G visas each exceed two percent of the visa caseload. Within these categories, the most disconcerting is relationship fraud for official and diplomatic dependants. Diplomats and officials, including very high-level emissaries, commonly make fraudulent claims regarding biological and adopted children in order to bring them to the U.S. Post has received both unauthorized and fraudulent Notes Verbales supporting official and non-official visa applications. There were also instances of official visa applications, supported by the GoSL, which turned out to be for non-government employees. Additionally, student visa applicants can rarely explain their rationale in selecting a university. They usually select a bottom-tier school nearby family, suggesting intent to immigrate.

At least once a month, IDENT or FR hits uncover an applicant with a second identity.

IV Fraud

3. Embassy Sierra Leone resumed Immigrant Visa processing on May 4, 2009, concluding a twelve-year hiatus. Embassy Dakar processed these applications during the interim. Aside from a few SIVs for USG employees, all IVs are family-based. Applicants often know little to nothing about their petitioning relatives, and petitioning

spouses often came to the U.S. as the result of a marriage that coincidentally dissolved around the time of naturalization. Post hears many anecdotes and the occasional poison pen letter about various schemes to import family members to the U.S. on fraudulent petitions. Post is still developing reliable methods to uncover and prove this type of fraud in individual cases.

DV Fraud

¶4. Embassy Freetown began processing DVs just before the beginning of this reporting period; previously, Embassy Abidjan adjudicated these cases. DV fraud is pervasive.

Nearly all applicants enter through a third party, often an agent who goes door-to-door or around college campuses with a camera. Typically, the agent's entry includes a distorted or blurry photo, data entry errors, and no family members. When the agent receives the selectee package, he holds it hostage from the principal applicant until the applicant either pays a fee up to USD 1,500 or marries a spouse of the agent's choice; that pop-up spouse will then be responsible for all fees to the agent and embassy. Some applicants may choose their own pop-up spouse, who may be a pre-existing spouse or other family member, or a stranger who offers enough money to offset the agent's fee.

A study of June 2009 cases revealed that 87% of spouses were pop-ups and 72% of all cases had pop-up spouses, in fact. This is an annual rate of 237 per thousand people.

On the whole, applicants present fraudulent educational documents,

FREETOWN 00000391 002 OF 004

and - less frequently - employment documents. Some documents are poor enough that the officer can refuse the applicant at the window.

However, many are real documents pertaining to another individual of the same name. Though the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) has dates of birth in its records, the sole WAEC verifying officer claims not to have access to this information, which would easily confirm fraud in many cases. Post is concerned that she may be the one providing many of these results to DV applicants.

ACS and U.S. Passport Fraud

¶5. Post has experienced little evidence of fraud over the past six months in ACS, but recommends DNA testing for many Consular Report of Birth Abroad (CRBA) applications.

Adoption Fraud

¶6. Sierra Leone has traditionally been a high fraud adoption post due to corruption, ignorance, and ineptitude at all stages of the local adoption process. However, GoSL suspended processing of all adoptions shortly after post started processing IVs, so there is little to report this period. This suspension will continue until the GoSL enacts a reformed adoption law. Post is closely monitoring the progress of the GoSL reform process, with a view to the integrity of its final disposition.

Use of DNA Testing

¶7. Due to CRBA cases often coming from non-traditional family situations and unreliable birth certificates, post recommends DNA testing in about 70% of cases. Historically, in about 15-20% of those, the blood relationship is disproved, and in about 10% of cases, applicants abandon the application after DNA testing was recommended. Post recommends DNA fairly often in IR-2 and IR-5 cases. Early information shows IR-5 cases are more likely to show

probably paternity/maternity than IR-2 cases.

Asylum and Other DHS Benefit Fraud

18. Embassy Conakry processes V92 and V93. Embassy Freetown receives many requests for transportation letters from LPRs who have lost or stolen I-551s. Airline security denied boarding to several imposters using other persons' I-551s.

Alien Smuggling, Trafficking, Organized Crime, Terrorist Travel

19. Post knows of no trafficking, organized crime, or terrorist travel related to consular operations. Alien smuggling is confined to illegal immigration purposes. Naturalized U.S. Citizens may marry their siblings or cousins, or arrange with another U.S. citizen to marry each other's relatives to avoid even the possibility of DNA testing. Alien smugglers also include DV fixers, and post is working to uncover their identities and locations.

DS Criminal Fraud Investigations

110. RSO has taken a more active role in consular issues during this reporting period. Foremost was the successful investigation of LES malfeasance. RSO is also assisting in uncovering visa fraud fixer rings, the source of fraudulent documents and other instances of misrepresentation. There is no formal referral system, but the RSO and Fraud Prevention Manager (FPM) maintain a collaborative relationship.

Host Country Passport, Identity Documents, and Civil Registry

111. PASSPORT: The Sierra Leonean passport in production since 2001 has a machine-readable bio page with a photo-digitized picture (large and small) and signature. Older passports became obsolete in 2002. In theory, applicants must for an interview and present a birth certificate and national ID card. However, the Immigration

FREETOWN 00000391 003 OF 004

Office does not enforce or verify these requirements. There are three passports, distinguished by the prefix of the passport number: ordinary ("O"), service ("S"), and diplomatic ("D"). "Service" or "Diplomatic" also appears on the front cover. All inside pages have watermarks and the passport number hole-punched at the top. Passports contain the following UV luminescent features:

- Cross-hatching on inside covers
- Crest and hidden lion on inside front cover
- Hidden passport number on page 1 (ordinary passports only)
- Page numbers and a square at the edge of each page, starting at the top and moving down each page until the center of the book, then back up.
- Sierra Leone Crest at the bottom of each page and "Republic of Sierra Leone" near the top.
- Monochrome binding string, between pages 16 and 17.

ID CARD: GoSL started production of a new National ID card during the reporting period, following a 5-year break. The format appears quite secure, with several overt security features and a 2D barcode.

BIRTH AND DEATH CERTIFICATES: The Registrar of Births and Deaths does little verification of information reported for certificates, so real documents with false information are easily available. There are three types of first-time birth certificates, depending on when the birth is registered:

- 0 to 30 days: original

-- 31 days to 1 year: late
-- Over 1 year: delayed

Certified true copies are available. These are transcriptions of the record, not facsimiles of the original. The clerks often issue delayed certificates instead of certified copies to avoid searching records for the original. The registrar fills the data in handwriting, and then stamps and signs. There was an instance where the father listed on the birth certificate was in fact a stepfather.

Births are often unregistered, particularly outside of medical centers. Many rural records were destroyed during the war. To remedy this, there was a free mass registration of minors on June 20 and 21, 2003. All birth certificates issued then have the prefix "DAC." DAC registrations are especially prone to fraud.

One must apply for a death certificates within fourteen days of the death so that the Registrar can then issue a burial permit.

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE CERTIFICATES: Marriage certificates can be civil, Christian, Muslim, or traditional. Local law requires registration of all marriages, but the procedures for registration of traditional marriages with local councils are new and rarely followed. It is easy to obtain a real marriage certificate for a sham marriage, particularly with certain suspect mosques and churches. Accordingly, imams and pastors will often attest to the authenticity of the marriage certificate, for a fee.

Cooperation with Host Government Authorities

¶12. Post has interacted with host government authorities on a limited basis on fraud matters. Post verifies documents with the Administrator and Registrar-General, Births & Deaths Office, WAEC, and the High Court. Verification can be slow, particularly at the High Court. Upon notification by the Embassy of visa related fraud, the Sierra Leone Police arrested two subjects related matters during the reporting period, but failed to secure convictions. The judicial system is largely corrupt and inefficient.

Areas of Particular Concern

¶13. Post will conduct substantial outreach in an effort to have DV applicants enter themselves rather than use agents. Since taking up IV and DV duties, the part-time FPM has insufficient time to supervise the FPU, a problem highlighted by the LES malfeasance. To remedy this problem, post intends to request a consular EFM position this year.

Staffing and Training

FREETOWN 00000391 004 OF 004

¶14.

A) Vice Consul, part-time FPM, no formal training, also manages the IV/DV unit, and provides all categories of consular services.

B) LES Fraud Prevention Assistant, also handles federal benefits, has taken the FSN Fraud Prevention Workshop (PC542) at FSI and Detecting Fraudulent Documents (PC544) online.

C) Vacant LES Fraud Prevention Assistant position, which will be filled shortly.

FEDZER